

HEROIN: THE FACTS

What is it?

Heroin is a highly addictive drug made from morphine, a substance from the opium poppy. It is a “downer” that affects the brain’s pleasure systems and interferes with the ability to perceive pain.

What does it look like?

White to dark brown powder or tar-like substance.

What are the street names/slang terms for it?

Big H, Blacktar, Brown sugar, Dope, Horse, Junk, Mud, Skag, Smack

How is it used?

Snorting heroin has become popular especially with new users. It can be injected into a vein (“mainlining”) or into a muscle, smoked in a water pipe or standard pipe, mixed in a marijuana joint or regular cigarette, and inhaled as smoke through a straw, known as “chasing the dragon.”

What are its short-term effects?

If injected there is an initial feeling of pleasure (“rush”), followed by a warm flushing of the skin, slowed breathing, a dry mouth, and a feeling of heaviness causing a wakeful and drowsy state (“nodding”). Heroin used other ways causes the same effects without the initial rush. Other symptoms include slowed and slurred speech, slow gait, pinpoint pupils, droopy eyelids, impaired night vision, nausea, vomiting, and constipation.

What are its long-term effects?

Heroin abuse can cause serious health conditions including collapsed veins, infection of the heart lining and valves, abscesses, pneumonia, liver disease, spontaneous abortion, infectious diseases and/or a fatal overdose (even when first used). In addition to the effects of the drug itself, street heroin may have additives that do not really dissolve and result in clogging the blood vessels that lead to the lungs, liver, kidneys or brain possibly causing infection or even death of cells in these vital organs. With regular heroin use, tolerance develops. This means the abuser must use more heroin to achieve the same intensity or effect. As higher doses are used over time, physical dependence and addiction develop. Withdrawal is miserable causing flu-like symptoms, restlessness, and irritability.

FACT SHEET

Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Abuse Clearinghouse

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